

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I have said earlier today I do not think this is an appropriate response to the bipartisan appeal from Philadelphia, to be filibustering very narrow legislation to help volunteers respond to the call by four former Presidents and a former Chief of Staff. But there will be plenty of time to talk about that. I know that the senior Senator from Texas has 5 minutes on another matter. So I ask unanimous consent that he be allowed up to 5 minutes to cover that, and then we will return to the motion to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Texas will be recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, let me join my colleague in expressing my disappointment that at the very moment where we have our former Presidents urging voluntarism, the Senate, on a partisan vote, is blocking our effort to remove legal liability constraints that limit the willingness of people to volunteer. So I am very disappointed that we did not get the job done, and I trust that this will not be the end of this bill.

TEXAS WAIVER FOR WELFARE SERVICES CONSOLIDATION

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I wanted to raise an issue today and in the process urge the administration to move ahead and grant a waiver to the State of Texas to consolidate their office whereby they provide access to services like AFDC, food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, and other public service programs.

In an effort to innovate and save money, the State of Texas, under the leadership of our Governor, has come up with the idea of allowing public/private partnerships, such as EDS and the Texas Department of Human Services and Lockheed/Martin and the Texas Workforce Commission, to bid for the opportunity to move toward a more efficient provision of welfare services in out State.

The bottom line is the State of Texas has put together a proposal to use private technology with the public sector to unify the eligibility and application processes for a number of welfare benefits. The State of Texas can save \$200 million a year in State taxpayer funds that can be used for education or for public assistance or for law enforcement, and they have asked the administration to sign off on a waiver to let the State adopt this procedure, saving \$200 million, and the President has steadfastly refused to grant a waiver. Over and over and over again, we are seeing delays from the White House.

If the White House does not move ahead and grant this waiver so that Texas can operate its AFDC and Medicaid programs efficiently, then Senator HUTCHISON and I are going to have to move on the floor of the Senate to pass

a law to mandate that this waiver be granted.

It is outrageous for the President to continue to give speeches about welfare reform, to talk about giving States the ability to innovate and to try new methods to provide better services and to save costs, save money, and then turn right around and refuse to grant a waiver that would dramatically improve the efficiency of the system in Texas that would make it easier for people who are truly needy to get assistance.

What is the issue? By moving to a public/private partnership and saving \$200 million, some State bureaucrats and the unions who represent them are afraid they might lose their jobs. Even though Texas could save \$200 million and even though millions of beneficiaries would benefit from greater efficiency, the President is afraid to take on a special-interest group by granting this waiver. In this case the special-interest group is organized labor.

This is exactly the kind of activity we encouraged in our welfare reform bill which passed on a bipartisan basis. This is exactly what the President says every time he speaks on welfare reform. The State of Texas is trying to be efficient and save money, and they cannot get the White House to say yes or no.

Basically, what I am saying to the White House today is this: say yes or no, and get on with making the decision. If you are not going to allow the State of Texas to carry out the mandate of welfare reform, if you are not going to allow them to save money, if you are not going to allow them to operate their programs efficiently, then the Congress is going to have to act to grant this waiver.

It makes absolutely no sense for the administration to refuse to say yes or no. This is a clear-cut question: Is the power of special interests within the White House so dominating and so overwhelming that when a State tries to operate under the new welfare reform bill, when a State tries to save \$200 million annually of the taxpayers' money, and when a State tries to improve services by bringing the private sector into the process, it is prevented from doing so? Should we let one special interest keep all those good things from happening? That is the question that the President is going to have to answer in deciding whether to grant this waiver. I want to urge the President to grant the waiver and to do it soon.

I yield the floor. I thank the Senator from Georgia for yielding the time.

Mr. REED addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 5 minutes as if in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REED. I thank the Chair.

NOMINATION OF ALEXIS HERMAN

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on an issue that is important to many Rhode Islanders and I believe touches on the credibility of this body. I would like to add my voice to the voice of many of my colleagues in support of Alexis Herman as the Secretary of Labor. The appointment of Alexis Herman was approved by the Labor and Human Resources Committee unanimously on April 10, almost 3 weeks ago. This unanimous vote came after an appropriately arduous examination of Ms. Herman's record. She spent months successfully completing a far-reaching questionnaire submitted by the majority. She subsequently came before the committee and spent hours testifying as to her past accomplishments and her vision for the Department of Labor. She completed these tasks successfully, and a full vote of the Senate was originally scheduled for April 16.

Yet, that vote has now been placed on indefinite hold. I believe this reflects poorly on this body. We have asked Ms. Herman to defend her record and outline her agenda for the Department of Labor. She has done that. Indeed, she has performed that task well enough to gain the unanimous support of our committee. We now owe her the courtesy of consideration by the full Senate. Not only do we owe this courtesy to Ms. Herman, but we have a duty to hard-working men and women in this country to have their interests adequately represented in the Cabinet of the President of the United States. Every day policy decisions affecting workers go unaddressed because there is no Secretary.

While some may take financial stability for granted in today's economy, we in Rhode Island certainly do not. The Department of Labor has played a consistent and productive role in helping Rhode Island to cope with the economic challenges that it faces. We need a Secretary of Labor to help us continue in these efforts.

Economically, Rhode Island has been hard hit by changing economic conditions and defense downsizing.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's we lost over 10 percent of our manufacturing jobs due mostly to defense downsizing but also to changes in the economy. These effects continue to plague our economy. Thankfully, the Department of Labor, under the leadership of then Secretary Reich, was there consistently to provide assistance in lessening the burden of this impact on working Rhode Islanders. For example, in December of 1995, Rhode Island's largest grocery store, Almacs, declared bankruptcy immediately before Christmas. This bankruptcy resulted in Rhode Island's single largest layoff, over 2,000 workers, immediately before the 1995 holidays. The private sector committed what they could, volunteering food, holiday gifts and job placement services, but the former employees faced severe hardship.